

The Sneaky Reason So Many Pet Businesses Require Bordetella Vaccine

You wouldn't believe the real reason so many boarding kennels, doggy daycares, groomers and even some vets require your dogs to be vaccinated for kennel cough. It's not at all what you'd expect. What's more, the vaccine is far riskier than you're told. Do this instead.

Analysis by Dr. Karen Shaw Becker

STORY AT-A-GLANCE

- Kennel cough, or Bordetella, is a common and highly contagious upper respiratory condition in dogs that is typically triggered by more than one infectious agent
- Most cases of kennel cough are transmitted in facilities where lots of dogs are housed in close quarters
- The classic symptom of a Bordetella infection is a dry hacking cough
- Whenever possible, it's best to let kennel cough run its course with the aid of natural, nontoxic remedies
- It's also best to avoid Bordetella vaccines for a variety of reasons; instead, focus on supporting your dog's immune system

Editor's Note: This article is a reprint. It was originally published February 06, 2019.

Kennel cough, which is also called infectious tracheobronchitis or Bordetella, is a very common upper respiratory infection in dogs that can be triggered by several different viruses and bacteria. By far the most common culprit is the simultaneous presence of the parainfluenza virus and the bacteria called Bordetella bronchiseptica.

Kennel cough is highly contagious and dogs can remain infectious for six to 14 weeks after their symptoms resolve. That's why most veterinarians recommend Bordetella vaccines. In case you hadn't guessed, I'm not one of them. The fact is Bordetella vaccines are, for the most part, useless. They won't prevent your dog or any dog from acquiring kennel cough. I'll discuss this in more detail later.

How Kennel Cough Spreads From Dog to Dog

Both viral and bacterial causes of kennel cough are transmitted through the air by sneezing, coughing dogs. Many types of stressors can compromise the respiratory tracts of otherwise healthy dogs, making them susceptible to Bordetella bronchiseptica, the chief infectious bacteria involved in kennel cough. A few of these stressors include:

- Travel
- Being housed in a shelter, boarding facility or other similar environment
- Cold temperatures

- Environmental pollutants (e.g., dust or cigarette smoke)
- Infectious viruses such as the parainfluenza virus, reovirus, adenovirus or distemper

Bordetella bacteria are typically accompanied by at least one other infectious agent, most commonly a virus. So kennel cough is actually multiple infections rather than a single infection. Most cases of kennel cough occur in dogs that spend time with other dogs in crowded quarters with inadequate ventilation and lots of warm air.

Symptoms and Diagnosis of Kennel Cough

Generally speaking, if an otherwise healthy dog suddenly begins coughing, it's usually due to an infection in the form of some type of kennel cough, virus, bacteria or a combination.

A sudden dry hacking cough, sneezing, snorting, retching, gagging or vomiting in response to very light pressure to the trachea, or a spasmodic cough when a dog is excited or exercising are all common symptoms of kennel cough. A nasal discharge may be present, and sometimes there can also be fever. A Beagle with kennel cough:

However, it's important to know that severe cases of kennel cough primarily occur in immunocompromised dogs or in very young puppies. It's rare to lose a dog with a competent immune system to kennel cough.

Diagnosis is made by observing one or more of the symptoms listed above, often coupled with a history of the dog having spent time at a boarding facility, puppy mill or shelter. Bacterial cultures, viral isolations and bloodwork can be performed to identify the specific pathogens causing the exact type of kennel cough the dog has. Some veterinarians take x-rays, which can show **bronchitis**.

Treatment Options

Kennel cough symptoms usually last between 10 and 20 days and can recur during periods of stress. Most cases resolve without medical intervention, so I don't automatically recommend treatment. Antibiotics aren't immediately warranted in most cases. Whenever possible, I prefer to let a dog's body heal itself naturally. Safe, all-natural remedies for kennel cough include:

- **Nosodes** — A nosode is a homeopathic remedy derived from a pathological specimen. Nosodes stimulate the natural immune system to react against specific diseases. Kennel cough nosodes are particularly effective, but are by prescription only through your functional medicine veterinarian.
- **Esberitox** — This is a fast-acting Echinacea from health food stores that I have found very effective in reducing the virulence of bordetella infections.
- **Vitamins C and E** — Vitamin C is an antiviral and E provides immune system support.
- **Oregano oil** has antiseptic, antifungal, antiviral and antibacterial properties.
- **Astragalus** is an herb used in Chinese medicine to enhance the immune system, support lung function and stimulate the regeneration of bronchial cells.
- **Raw garlic and olive leaf** are natural antibacterial and antiviral agents.

- **Raw manuka honey** will ease the discomfort of coughing, and certain herbs will soothe and naturally suppress a cough, among them licorice root and marshmallow.
- **Essential oils** can be diffused to help a pup with kennel cough breathe easier. Oils of eucalyptus, lavender and tea tree have antibacterial and antiviral properties. Chamomile has a calming effect.

Talk with your integrative veterinarian about which natural remedies and doses or applications are most appropriate for your pet. Dogs with kennel cough often have very sensitive tracheas, so a collar can trigger an episode of coughing. If your dog is coughing for any reason, I recommend using a harness rather than a collar to take all the pressure off the trachea. Dogs, and especially coughing dogs, should never be pulled around or led by the neck.

You might also try humidifying the air, if you believe your pet has kennel cough, as moisture in the environment can help reduce or alleviate coughing spells. Complete recovery from kennel cough can take up to three weeks in healthy dogs, and twice as long in older patients or in dogs with underlying immunosuppressive conditions. Puppies can also take a bit longer to recover.

Since a serious episode of kennel cough can result in pneumonia, if your dog doesn't start to improve on her own within about a week, or if the cough becomes progressively worse, it's important to make an appointment with your veterinarian to be on the safe side.

I also recommend seeing a vet if you have a puppy with symptoms that go beyond the typical symptoms of kennel cough. If he suddenly has a change in breathing patterns, has difficulty breathing, stops eating or has a markedly diminished energy level, it's time to make an appointment.

Bordetella Vaccines

Unfortunately, many boarding kennels, doggy daycares, groomers and even some veterinarians require dogs be vaccinated for kennel cough. It's important to realize the only reason these facilities demand your dog be vaccinated is simply to remove liability from their businesses.

As I mentioned earlier, kennel cough is most often a complex cocktail of different infections rather than a single infection. Because it's caused by a variety of different bacteria and viruses, there's no single vaccine that can provide protection for every potential infectious agent.

In addition, whatever protection the vaccine might offer wears off very quickly, usually in less than a year, which means your dog will need to be revaccinated at least annually if you use pet care businesses that insist on the vaccine.

On occasion, I have been forced to give the Bordetella vaccine for clients who must leave their pets at a boarding facility that requires it. I always use the intranasal vaccine, as it is significantly less toxic than the adjuvanted injectable vaccines, which I believe should never be used.

If for some reason you must vaccinate with the injectable Bordetella vaccine, I recommend you consult an integrative veterinarian about detox options. The most important thing to remember is that your dog can still get kennel cough even if she has been recently vaccinated. So I strongly recommend that you avoid this unnecessary and frequently ineffective vaccine if at all possible.

I recommend instead that you focus on keeping your dog's immune system strong and resilient, which is the best defense against kennel cough. Steps you can take include:

- Feeding a **nutritionally balanced, species-appropriate, fresh food diet**
- Avoiding unnecessary vaccinations and overuse of veterinary drugs and chemical parasite and pest preventives
- Reducing the environmental toxins your dog is exposed to, which will in turn lessen his toxic burden and biological stress

Also talk to your integrative veterinarian about natural immune boosters like turmeric, oregano, fresh garlic, useful herbs and virus-fighting essential oils.

Sources and References

[Bark Post](#)
